

**DEWITT CENTER  
Placer County, California**

**REPORT OF SURVEYS**

**By  
North Fork Associates**

**Spring 2003**

**Introduction**

At the request of the Placer County Department of Facility Services, North Fork Associates conducted surveys for “special status species” at the County’s DeWitt Center property in north Auburn. Previous studies performed by North Fork Associates included a biological resources assessment for the 15-acre Placer County Detention Facility, Main Jailhouse #4 property that resulted in a *Biological Resources Assessment Report* (January 8, 2001) and a *Supplement to the Biological Resources Assessment Report* (January 29, 2001). These investigations included a general biotic and habitat characterization and wetland delineation, as well as a review of special status plant and animal species that could potentially occur on that portion of the DeWitt Center property.

In 2002, North Fork Associates conducted a similar biological resources assessment and wetland delineation for the larger 180-acre DeWitt Center property. This effort resulted in a *Wetland Delineation Report* (July 15, 2002), a habitat map for the entire site, and a Biological Resources Existing Conditions Report intended for use in an Environmental Impact Report being prepared. Subsequently, it was decided that more detailed surveys should be conducted at more appropriate times of the year for special status species that previous work indicated had some potential to occur on the site. Those special status species previously identified as potentially occurring on the DeWitt Center Study Area, considering the habitats and conditions that occur on the site, are shown in Table 1 (below).

**Table 1  
Potentially Occurring Special Status Animal Species  
in the DeWitt Center Study Area**

<b>Species</b>	<b>Status*</b>	<b>Habitat Description</b>	<b>Likelihood of Occurrence</b>
<b>Amphibians</b>			
California red-legged frog ( <i>Rana aurora draytonii</i> )	FT	Still or slow-moving waters with emergent vegetation	Unlikely

Species	Status*	Habitat Description	Likelihood of Occurrence
Foothill yellow-legged frog ( <i>Rana boylei</i> )	FSC CSC	Shallow shaded streams with rocky substrates	Unlikely
Western spadefoot ( <i>Scaphiopus hammondi</i> )	FSC CSC	Grassland and foothill woodlands with seasonal pools	Unlikely
<b>Reptiles</b>			
Pond turtle ( <i>Clemmys marmorata</i> ssp), western, northwestern, and southwestern	CSC	Still or slow-moving waters with basking sites and pools for cover and escape	Likely
California horned lizard ( <i>Phrynosoma coronatum frontate</i> )	FSC CSC	Foothill hardwoods, riparian habitats, and annual grasslands	Possible
<b>Birds</b>			
White-tailed kite-nesting ( <i>Elanus leucurus</i> )	CFP	Open savanna and grasslands with nearby trees for roosting and nesting	Observed on site
Cooper's hawk-nesting ( <i>Accipiter cooperii</i> )	CSC	Open woodlands and riparian. Requires dense canopy trees for nesting	Possible
Northern harrier-nesting ( <i>Circus cyaneus</i> )	CSC	Meadows, grasslands, and rangelands. Nests on ground near shrubby cover	Unlikely
White-faced ibis-rookery ( <i>Plegadis chihi</i> )	FSC CSC	Large freshwater marshes, sloughs, and ponds surrounded by dense willows and emergent vegetation	Unlikely
Western burrowing owl-burrow sites ( <i>Athene cunicularia hypugaea</i> )	FSC CSC	Open country and arid grasslands with abundant rodent populations	Unlikely
Long-eared owl-nesting ( <i>Asio otus</i> )	CSC	Dense mixed forests close to meadows and open grasslands. Nests in abandoned nests of other species and in tree cavities	Unlikely
Lewis' woodpecker-nesting ( <i>Melanerpes lewis</i> )	FSC	Open country with scattered trees. Prefers conifers with understory of grasses and shrubs	Unlikely
Loggerhead shrike-nesting ( <i>Lanius ludovicianus</i> )	FSC CSC	Open woodlands and shrubby grasslands. Requires dense brush for nesting	Unlikely

Species	Status*	Habitat Description	Likelihood of Occurrence
Yellow warbler-nesting ( <i>Dendroica petechia brewsteri</i> )	CSC	Open canopy riparian, shrub, and chaparral habitats. Nests in willows, alders and other small trees and shrubs	Unlikely
Yellow-breasted chat-nesting ( <i>Icteria virens</i> )	CSC	Riparian thickets. Nests in dense shrubs and small trees	Unlikely
Tricolored blackbird-nesting ( <i>Agelaius tricolor</i> )	FSC CSC	Freshwater emergent marshes, preferably dominated by cattails or bulrush	Unlikely
<b>Mammals</b>			
Pallid bat ( <i>Antrozous pallidus</i> )	CSC	Uses a variety of habitats, preferably arid, with rocky areas for roosting. Day roosts include trees and buildings.	Possible
Small-footed myotis bat ( <i>Myotis ciliolabrum</i> )	FSC	Arid woodlands, brushy uplands, near water	Possible
Yuma myotis bat ( <i>Myotis yumanensis</i> )	FSC	Open woodlands near water	Possible
Townsend's big-eared bat ( <i>Plecotus townsendii</i> )	FSC CSC	Uses a variety of habitats. Roosts in caves, mines and buildings. Extremely sensitive to disturbance	Unlikely
San Joaquin pocket mouse ( <i>Perognathus inornatus</i> )	FSC CSC	Open grassland, shrub areas on fine sandy soil	Unlikely

\*FT = Federally listed as threatened

CFP = California fully protected species

FSC = Unlisted but considered a Species of Concern by the Fish and Wildlife Service

CSC = Unlisted but considered a Species of Special Concern by the California Department of Fish and Game

## Surveys

With the exception of surveys for bats, wildlife surveys focusing on potential habitats for the above listed species were conducted in April and May 2003. Special attention was also given to areas that could be used by nesting raptors. Transects in potential habitats in the west and southern peripheries of the site and in the northeast corner were walked by qualified biologists at various times of the day. All wildlife species actually observed, or whose presence was confirmed by tracks, scat, or vocalizations, were recorded. In addition, the quality of the habitat for these special status species was carefully evaluated.

Bat surveys were not conducted. It is known that bats (species unidentified) roost in several of the buildings on the site. Rather than disturb them at this time by attempting

to identify them to species, or risk harming them by capture, for planning purposes it will be assumed that special status bat species do occur on the site.

Field surveys that focused specifically on the occurrence and potential habitat for amphibians (California red-legged frogs, foothill yellow-legged frogs, and western spadefoot) were conducted on April 2 and April 4. The April 2 survey was done in late afternoon after periods of prolonged rain. It was centered in the grassland and seasonal wetland areas and the ponds in the southwest portion of the property. The April 4 survey was conducted after dark and was centered on the ponds and other wetland areas determined to be flooded during the April 2 survey. Vocalizations were studied to determine species when visual observations could not be made.

Morning field surveys for all wildlife species were conducted on April 16 and May 14. While these focused on the more natural habitats along the southern periphery of the site and in the undeveloped western portion of the site, the area in the northeast corner was also evaluated. These surveys generally began around 8:00 AM and continued until early afternoon. An evening survey was also conducted in the southwest portion of the site on May 14. During these surveys, the suitability of the various habitats to support special status species was evaluated. Particular attention was paid to potential nest sites for raptors, both on the DeWitt Center property and in areas immediately adjacent where observations could be made from within the DeWitt center property.

## **Results**

A list of all species observed on the site during these surveys, as well as those detected during the 2002 biological resources assessment, is appended. The following is a brief discussion of our findings with regard to special status species and nesting raptors.

**Amphibians.** The California red-legged frog (*Rana aurora draytonii*) is listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and as a species of special concern by the California Department of Fish and Game. This frog formerly occurred throughout the lower elevations of the Sierra and foothills, but has been virtually eliminated in those regions by habitat alteration and by the introduction of bullfrogs. No red-legged frogs are known to remain anywhere in the Auburn area. Although it does appear that suitable habitat occurs in the ponds on the DeWitt Center amid the overhanging and emergent vegetative cover, no red-legged frogs were detected and no calls were heard, even though surveys were conducted during the breeding season. The presence of a large population of bullfrogs in these habitats makes it extremely unlikely that the species exists there. However, it should be noted that, unrelated to planned activities on the DeWitt Center, protocol level surveys will be conducted by Gibson and Skordal that will encompass the DeWitt Center property. These should provide further insight as to the potential presence of the species in the immediate vicinity.

The foothill yellow-legged frog (*Rana boylei*) is listed as a species of concern by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and as a species of special concern by the California Department of Fish and Game. This frog inhabits pools adjacent to riffle areas in permanent streams with rocky substrate and overhanging cover. They are seldom found more than 50 yards from these aquatic habitats. There is no suitable habitat for

this species on the DeWitt Center property and they were neither found nor heard during surveys there. It can be assumed they do not occur on the site.

The western spadefoot (*Scaphiopus hammondi*) is considered a species of concern by the Fish and Wildlife Service and a species of special concern by the California Department of Fish and Game. This species is quite common within its range, which includes the Sierra foothills up to about 4500 feet in elevation. It inhabits primarily grassland areas but may also be found in foothill hardwood woodlands. Optimal habitat is grassland interspersed with shallow temporary pools, which are used during the March-April breeding season. The adults spend most of their lives underground in burrows, emerging only at night or during periods of rain to feed and/or breed. Newly metamorphosed juveniles seldom move far from the breeding ponds. There appears to be no suitable habitat for them on the property. Very few shallow, seasonally ponded depressions were found on the site and very few burrows were observed. No western spadefoot were found during surveys and no vocalizations were heard. It is highly unlikely that they would be found on the site.

**Reptiles.** Pond turtles (*Clemmys marmorata*), including the western, northwestern, and southwestern subspecies, are considered a species of special concern by the California Department of Fish and Game. These turtles occur throughout California, west of the Cascade-Sierra crest associated with ponds and waterways in grassland, oak woodland, and coniferous forest. This aquatic reptile inhabits quiet waters of ponds, marshes, creeks, and irrigation ditches. The species was observed (subspecies unknown) in the upper pond at the southwest corner of the site. It probably also occurs in the lower pond although none were observed there.

The California horned lizard (*Phrynosoma coronatum frontate*) is identified as a species of concern by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a species of special concern by the California Department of Fish and Game. It is found from Tehama County south to Tulare County and its habitats includes foothill hardwoods, annual grasslands, and riparian habitats, especially in loose or sandy soils. It was not observed on the site and suitable soil conditions for the species were not found on the site.

**Birds.** The white-tailed kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) is considered a species of concern by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It nests in riparian and oak woodlands in the Central Valley and Sierra foothills and forages within open grassland and savanna areas. The species was observed foraging on the site on several occasions. Suitable nesting habitat occurs in the southwest corner of the property, and in nearby areas to the south and west. However, no nests were located, either on or off the site. Nevertheless, it is possible that the species nests there and pre-construction surveys should be conducted before any trees are removed from these areas.

Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) is listed as a species of special concern by the California Department of Fish and Game. This is a small hawk that inhabits mature forested areas and woodlots throughout California. The species nests in deciduous or coniferous trees with dense canopies, usually along the woodland edge and close to meadows, grasslands, and/or open water. Suitable habitat appears to exist in the

southwestern portion of the site but the species was not observed during surveys and no nests were located. Pre-construction surveys should be undertaken before any trees are removed from that area.

The northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) is also listed as a species of special concern by the California Department of Fish and Game. This is a bird of the open country that forages over grasslands, meadows, marsh areas, and rangeland. It nest on the ground in tall grasses, usually near or under dense shrubbery. There is only a small amount of marginal nesting habitat for this species on the site, and very limited areas for foraging. This usually conspicuous bird was not observed during surveys on the site and it is highly unlikely that they occur there or use the area for foraging.

The white-faced ibis (*Plegadis chihi*) is a species of concern for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It inhabits large freshwater marshes and the margins of lakes. It requires extensive stands of dense willows and emergent vegetation to provide secure and undisturbed roosting habitat. It normally forages for aquatic invertebrates, crayfish, frogs and small fishes in emergent wetlands but will frequently feed in flooded agricultural grain fields as well. There is very limited and only marginally suitable habitat for the species in the vicinity of the ponds in the southwest corner of the property. However, the species was not observed on there and is highly unlikely to be found there.

The western burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia hypugaea*) is considered a species of concern by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a species of special concern by the California Department of Fish and Game. It is a bird of open country and arid grasslands with abundant rodent populations that are their main food source and that provide burrows the owls use for nesting and protection from predators. There is no suitable habitat for the species on the site and they are not found there.

The long-eared owl (*Asio otus*) is listed as a species of special concern by the California Department of Fish and Game. They inhabit dense, mixed forests, usually next to open areas such as grasslands, meadows, marshes, or open water lakes or ponds. They nest in abandoned nests of other large avian species or in tree cavities. Very limited habitat suitable for this species is found on the site and it was not observed during surveys. It is highly unlikely that they would be found there, either nesting or foraging.

Lewis' woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*) is considered a species of concern by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It inhabits open pine-oak woodland, oak or cottonwood groves in grassland areas, and open ponderosa pine forests. It prefers conifers with an understory of grasses and low shrubs. It is primarily a bird of open country and, unlike other woodpeckers, feeds primarily on insects that it catches on the wing. It also stores acorns for winter use. There is no suitable habitat for the species on DeWitt Center property and none were observed during surveys. It should be assumed they do not occur on the property.

Loggerhead shrikes (*Lanius ludovicianus*) are listed as a species of concern by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a species of special concern by the California Department

of Fish and Game. They inhabit open habitats with scattered trees, shrubs, fence post or other perches from which they forage. They nest in dense shrubbery or small dense trees not far above the ground. Some suitable habitat for the species appears to exist in the southwest and northeast corners of the site but none were observed during surveys.

The yellow warbler (*Dendroica petechia brewsteri*), listed as a species of special concern by the California Department of Fish and Game, is found in open canopy riparian habitats, scrubland, and dry, montane chaparral. They nest in the forks of small trees or bushes, typically 3 to 8 feet off the ground. Only limited quantities of habitat suitable for the species is found on the DeWitt Center and they were not found during springtime surveys.

The yellow-breasted chat (*Icteria virens*) is a species of special concern to the California Department of Fish and Game. They are primarily a bird of dense riparian thickets, although dense brush near watercourses will also suffice. They nest in dense foliage 2 to 8 feet above the ground. There is a very limited quantity of marginal habitat for the species at the DeWitt Center property and they were not observed during springtime surveys. It is highly unlikely that they would be found on the site.

Tricolored blackbirds (*Agelaius tricolor*) are listed as a species of concern by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These birds are largely endemic to California and breed mostly in the Central Valley. Western Placer County is at the edge of this species' breeding range. Their preferred habitat is among the cattails and tules in freshwater emergent marshes and around shallow lakes. There is limited habitat of this type for them on the DeWitt Center property. They were not observed on the site and it is highly unlikely that the species would be found there.

No raptor nests were found on the DeWitt Center property and none were observed from the property in areas immediately adjacent.

**Mammals.** The San Joaquin pocket mouse (*Perognathus inornatus*) occurs primarily in the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys: the foothills are on the edge of its range. It inhabits dry, open grasslands or scrub areas on fine textured or sandy soils, primarily on ridge tops and hillsides. Soil conditions suitable for the species are not found on the DeWitt Center property and it is highly unlikely that the species would be encountered there.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Two special status species are known to occur on the DeWitt center property – the western pond turtle and the white-tailed kite. The pond turtle lives and breeds in at least one of the ponds in the southwestern corner of the site. The white-tailed kite, listed as a fully protected species by the California Department of Fish and Game due to concern over loss of nesting habitat, regularly forages on the site and is certain to nest nearby, if not on the DeWitt Center itself. In addition, although not observed during field surveys this spring, there is still a reasonable possibility that Cooper's hawks occur on or use the site. Pre-construction surveys for white-tailed kite and the Cooper's hawk nests in the southwestern and western portion of the property, and in offsite areas

within 500 feet, should be undertaken prior to any construction activities in these areas to ensure against damaging nests or disrupting nesting activities.

With the exception of bats, which are assumed to be onsite, it is highly unlikely that any other of the listed special status species occurs on the DeWitt Center property.